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**Enablers and barriers in the  
implementation of evidence based RSE  
resources in an Irish youth work  
setting: A case study of the REAL U  
programme**

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# Context

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- ▶ RSE essential to ensure young people can cultivate positive relationships with peers and prospective partners & protect themselves from unplanned pregnancy, STI's, abuse and exploitation.
  - ▶ While 86% of 18-25 yr olds have received RSE, school based RSE tends to leave unanswered questions in relation to emotions, sexuality and relationships (CPP, 2012)
  - ▶ Youth dev. progs have a role to play in providing RSE – recognising influence of education and socio-economic factors (Fullerton, 2006)
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# Evidence based practice in social care

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- ▶ Evidence based practice...acknowledges the need for resources to ‘help practitioners actually use and apply responsibly and reliably in practice the products of..research’ (Proctor & Rosen, 2008, p. 287)
  - ▶ But often met with resistance from practitioners
  - ▶ Not common in youth work
    - distinguished by its informal nature – learning occurs through ‘the twists and turns of conversation’ (Coburn, 2011)
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# Context: Foróige

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- ▶ Ireland's largest youth organisation
- ▶ Core philosophy – ***to enable young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of society'***
- ▶ Over 56,000 young people engaged annually
- ▶ Wide range of youth clubs, programmes and projects

**Best Practice Unit (BPU) established to develop evidence informed resources to support staff and volunteers in meeting the needs of young people**

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# REAL U Programme

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- ▶ Evidence based relationships & sexuality programme for delivery in youth work settings
- ▶ Funded by CPA
- ▶ 217 people trained in delivery (110 Foróige)



# Mixed methods study (Brady et al, 2014) found:

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- ▶ REAL U is a detailed, engaging and effective resource which is ideally suited to delivery in non-formal education settings
  - ▶ Programme is seen as effective in engaging young people, responding to their needs and impacting on their knowledge and attitudes in this area
  - ▶ **What factors facilitated or constrained implementation of this evidence based resource in youth work settings?**
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# What supports and constrains implementation of the programme?

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## Supports

- ▶ Robust process of development
- ▶ Excellent design
- ▶ Responsive to needs of young people
- ▶ Strong staff 'buy-in'

## Constraints

- ▶ Lower implementation among external agencies & some regions
- ▶ Impact of cutbacks on service delivery



# 1. Robust process of development

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Included:

- ▶ Literature review
  - ▶ Programme logic model, learning outcomes and curriculum
  - ▶ Pilot testing of draft resource
  - ▶ Programme adjustment based on feedback
  - ▶ Implementation (training & support)
  - ▶ Evaluation
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## 2. Excellent design

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Easy to use, adaptable

*'I love the programme. I think it's so important. I think it's one of the best programmes. Visually, it's easy to use. It's practical, the theory is so relevant to young people, the scenarios are so relevant.'*

(Focus Group 2)



# 3. Responsive to the needs of young people

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- Young people found the programme to be relevant, fun and insightful
- Participants said that it made them better informed and more aware of the consequences of their actions

‘Word of mouth’ created a strong demand in many areas

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*Its nearly 6 months since you did REAL U, has it made a difference to you?*

*Yes, we're more aware of the different things you can get and we're more aware of like the contraception you can get and we know like not to have a baby because it's just so much stress. We know how to act if something, a situation happens..... like for example, if your friends were fighting and you were in the middle of it, how to sort it out.*

*(Focus group 3, girl, 14)*

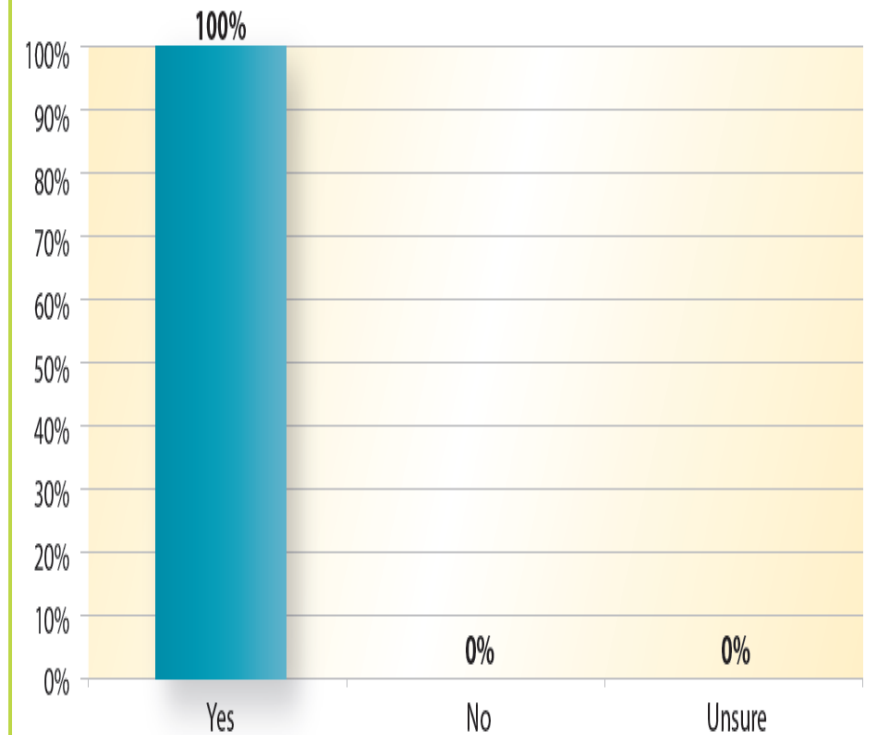
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## 4. Strong staff buy-in

- ▶ Relieved staff of the burden of finding & assembling relevant research & practice
- ▶ provides a framework, rationale and credibility for the work undertaken  
(Plath, 2014)

Figure 9: Responses to the question 'do you feel the programme is effective in what it sets out to do?' (n=50)





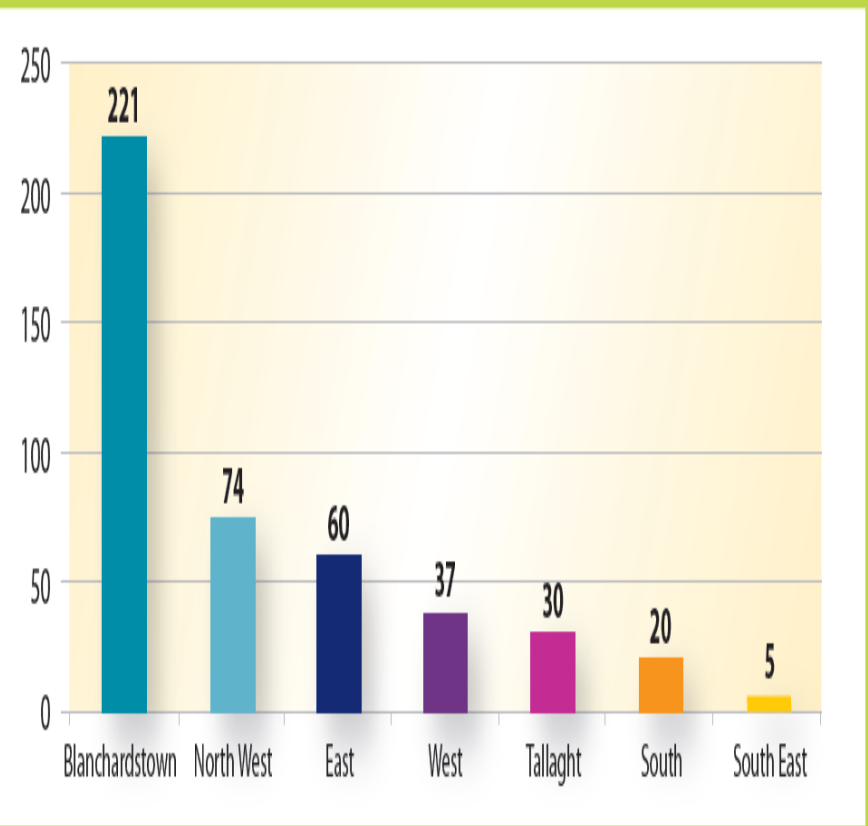
e.g. Gives them confidence to address difficult topics, such as pornography, STIs, contraception and domestic violence

*‘The REAL U programme is an excellent addition to my work, it is clear, concise and user friendly. It covers all the areas I need in my work. It has given me the skills to tackle subjects such as pornography which I never thought I would be able to facilitate a group on’* (Survey respondent, external agency).

## 5. Organisational context

- ▶ Delivery much higher among Foróige staff (73% vs 33% other agencies)
- ▶ Strongest concentration of delivery in Blanchardstown, North West and East regions of Foróige
- ▶ Training in programme does not guarantee implementation

Figure 5: Numbers of young people participating in REAL U training between 2012 and 2013 by each Foróige region



## 6. Resource cutbacks

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- ▶ 62% of staff delivered with fidelity, 38% adapted it
- ▶ Service cutbacks impact on delivery – made programme fidelity more challenging
- ▶ Too much adaptation may diminish ‘quality’ and coherence



# Conclusion

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- ▶ Implementation of evidence based health promotion resources in youth work settings can be very successful
  - ▶ Critical factors in ensuring success include a robust process of development, good design, relevance to young people and staff buy-in.
  - ▶ However, an excellent product may be limited in terms of its 'reach' and 'impact' due to organisational context & resource issues.
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